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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 001222

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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: MFA HIGHLIGHTS COUNTER-TERRORISM AND
DEVELOPMENT AS BILATERAL INTERESTS

Classified By: POL-ECON COUNSELOR KEVIN SULLIVAN. REASON: 1.4 (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. In an April 18 courtesy call, newly appointed Ethiopian MFA Counselor for Europe and America Tebege Berhe said conditions in Somalia had improved over the previous month, but that military operations remained "incomplete," having been curtailed due to concern about civilian casualties. Tebege complained that Eritrea was becoming "increasingly blatant" in its efforts throughout the region to destabilize Ethiopia, citing alleged involvement in terrorist activities, including abductions and attempted bombings in Ethiopia. Nevertheless, Ethiopia was still determined to avoid all-out war with its northern neighbor.
END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Pol-econ counselor and deputy (note-taker) met on April 18 with newly appointed MFA Counselor for Europe and America Tebege Berhe, who was accompanied by MFA Third Secretary Adam Tesfaye (GOE desk officer for the United

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States). Poloffs reviewed Ethio-American bilateral relations.

BILATERAL COOPERATION ON COUNTER-TERRORISM AND DEVELOPMENT

¶3. (C) Tebege underscored that the GOE deeply valued its strategic relationship with the United States, particularly in counter-terrorism cooperation, and as a development partner. Prior to 9/11, Ethiopia had faced the challenge of terrorism "alone". Ethiopia had been actively engaged in counter-terrorism since the early 1990s, he said, when it faced threats from al-Itihaad al-Islamiya (AIAI) and Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. Now, both countries shared a deep commitment to counter-terrorism, he added, highlighting USG cooperation and diplomatic assistance on Somalia over the last 8-10 months.

¶4. (U) Despite Ethiopian culture's millenia of history, modern Ethiopia had only 15 years experience as a "developing democracy," and therefore valued U.S. partnership in helping Ethiopia advance, Tebege said. While sometimes Congressional bills relating to Ethiopia were "not accurate, not balanced," USG development assistance was critical to continuing Ethiopia's progress. To counter previous periods of neglect,

the GOE had identified 4 regional states (Afar, Somali, Benishangul, and Gambella) that particularly needed assistance from the federal government to build local capacity, and to improve delivery of health and other social services. In contrast, Tebege said, Ethiopia's other regions (e.g., Amhara, Tigray, Oromiya), were "better equipped" for local governance. Pol-econ counselor reviewed USG development initiatives, and noted that USAID's Pastoralist Livelihoods Initiative sought to target the Somali region.

SOMALIA'S SECURITY IMPROVED BUT "INCOMPLETE"

¶5. (C) On Somalia, Tebege said security conditions had improved since the flare-up of violence in March, but that Ethiopian efforts to improve security remained "incomplete." Some Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) elements, including Adan Hashi Ayro, remained in Mogadishu. Intervention had been necessary to check growing violence, he said, citing recent attacks on African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) aircraft, and from insurgents near the Villa Somalia presidential compound. Ethiopia had succeeded in breaking "the backbone" of the insurgency, but had ceased military operations due to concerns about civilian casualties, he added. Ethiopia sought to withdraw from Somalia, but could not leave a vacuum, he said. Tebege reported some progress on the political front, as some Hawiye/Habr-Gedir/Ayr sub-clan members were now willing to separate themselves from extremists and to cooperate with Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG).

ERITREA SEEKING TO DESTABILIZE REGION

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¶6. (C) Tebege complained that Eritrea was becoming "increasingly blatant" in its efforts throughout the region to destabilize Ethiopia. In addition to supporting the CIC rather than Somalia's legitimate TFG, Eritrea was involved in "terrorist activities," including an attempt to bomb heads of state attending the January 2007 African Union summit in Addis Ababa, Tebege said. He said the Government of Eritrea (GSE) had orchestrated the February 2007 kidnapping of UK diplomats and of Ethiopians traveling with them in Ethiopia's Afar region, releasing the UK diplomats only when public pressure had become too strong. Tebege added that Eritrea's motivation had been simply to create the impression of instability and insecurity in Ethiopia. Ethiopia did not seek conflict with Eritrea, as "we benefit more from peace than they do," but Eritrea's terrorist activities needed to be neutralized, Tebege concluded.

¶7. (U) BIO-DATA: A fluent English speaker, Tebege Berhe is a graduate of the University of Colorado, and most recently served at Ethiopia's embassy in Ottawa. He replaces Ayalew Mamo as the second-highest ranking official in the MFA's Europe and America General Directorate. Ayalew Mamo, who previously served as consul in Ethiopia's embassy in Washington, D.C., and had served in Ethiopia's diplomatic service for nearly two decades, no longer is employed by the foreign ministry.
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